

I Timothy 3

If I Timothy Chapter 3 was read in complete isolation, we would probably get the impression that the assembly in Ephesus was a relatively new work.

After all, this chapter includes the qualifications of elders.

Wouldn't such a consideration indicate a first step in establishing a new assembly?

Well, yes, it would, and, yes, it should.

Even from the time of Paul's first missionary journey, he had been careful to take care of this matter almost immediately.

Acts 14:21-22 **"And when they had preached the gospel to that city and made many disciples, they returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch,**

22 strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting *them* to continue in the faith, and *saying*, "We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God."

No, they weren't preaching a prosperity gospel, were they?

But more to the point, V 23 tells us they "--**appointed elders in every church.**"

And this wasn't a one-time event either.

Sometime later, in Titus 1:5, we find Paul making the appointment of elders one of Titus's responsibilities: "**For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you--**"

So, if we looked at I Timothy Chapter 3 as an isolated case (a practise we should always avoid when studying scripture) we

would probably jump to the conclusion that the assembly in Ephesus was a relatively new work.

But such a conclusion would be completely wrong.

In actual fact, the Apostle Paul had invested a great deal of time and effort in Ephesus.

During his second missionary journey, he had visited that city briefly, and had left Aquila and Priscilla behind to sort of work up the ground.

During his third missionary journey, Ephesus turned out to be his main base of operation, as he reasoned **"daily in the school of Tyrannus."**

And according to Acts 19:10 **"---this continued for two years, so that all who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks."**

Finally, he was driven out of Ephesus by the silversmiths because his evangelistic efforts were cutting into their trade.

However, that wasn't the end of his influence in that area.

During his imprisonment in Rome, he wrote the Epistle to the Ephesians, which would have given them an excellent biblical foundation.

So, no, the assembly at Ephesus was not a developing work.

It was a deteriorating work.

The **"savage wolves"** Paul had warned them about were already among them, **"not sparing the flock."**

And some in their assembly had already **"--- turned aside to idle talk,**

7 desiring to be teachers of the law, understanding neither what they say nor the things which they affirm."

How discouraging it must have been for a man who had spent so much time laying a solid foundation.

However, this was no time for discouragement.

It was a time for action.

In his absence, he had encouraged Timothy to remain in Ephesus to confront the problem, and he would back him up with two epistles for his direction and authority.

I Timothy 3:14 -15 **"These things I write to you, though I hope to come to you shortly;**

15 but if I am delayed, I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth."

Certainly, this was a deplorable situation,
but in the providence of God, it was to
become a blessing.

The apostolic age was almost over.

Even the great Apostle Paul was nearing the
end of his journey.

So the writing of First and Second Timothy
would make a valuable addition to the New
Testament scriptures.

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And so, as we begin I Timothy Chapter 3,
Paul lays out the necessary
qualifications for elders.

But why now?

Wouldn't there be elders in the assembly
already?

Well, yes, I suppose there would be, but
what kind of elders were they?

What kind of elders would stand idly by
while some in their assembly were giving
"heed to fables and endless genealogies"?

And what were they doing about those who had
**"turned aside to idle talk, desiring to
be teachers of the law"?**

And when you consider the necessary
qualifications that were included in this
epistle, such as not **"given to wine, not
violent, not greedy for money,"** what was
their personal testimony?

Certainly, Timothy's presence, and the
authority and doctrinal instruction
contained in Paul's epistles were sorely
needed.

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Well, I think that's enough said about the
situation in Ephesus.

The good thing is, it resulted in the
writing of First and Second Timothy.

And what is more to the point, when it comes to this particular lesson, it resulted in the qualifications of elders and deacons being set down on paper.

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However, before we consider these qualifications, especially as it applies to elders, I think we should spend a little time looking at their responsibilities.

Why had God placed elders in every assembly? Well, the scriptures are very clear on that point.

In I Peter Chapter 5, we find the Apostle Peter describing their responsibilities.

In a word, elders are shepherds.

I Peter 5:1-5 **"The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be**

revealed: (and then, here are the responsibilities)

2 Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly;

3 nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock;

4 and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away."

In V 1, Paul describes himself as "**a fellow elder,**" and by doing so, he shoulders the same load that he is placing on them.

And according to V 2, their responsibility was to "**Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers."**

And even though their duties would take on many forms, the term shepherd pretty much puts it in a nutshell.

Under the Chief Shepherd, elders are the under shepherds who are responsible for the care of the flock.

It's a demanding task, and one that necessitates all the qualifications that Paul sets out in I Timothy Chapter 3.

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As we continue reading, in verses 2 and 3, we discover what should and should not be an elder's motivation.

For instance, the last part of V 2 tells us that an elder shouldn't be motivated by human "**compulsion.**"

I have taken the liberty of adding the word human, because, as in the case of any service for the Lord, there will be divine compulsion.

Even the Apostle Paul said in I Corinthians 9:16, **"For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for necessity is laid upon me; yes, woe is me if I do not preach the gospel!"**

Certainly, we are all very thankful for the many volunteers who have given their time unselfishly in the work of the assembly. But, in truth, believers are *not* volunteers. They are the Lord's servants, doing their Master's will because of their love for Him.

However, even though He is their Master, it is His good pleasure to reward them for a job well done, and it is His good pleasure to reward His faithful elders.

I Peter 5:4 **"---when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away."**

So then, an elder's motivation should not be human "**compulsion**," but he should shoulder the load "**willingly**."

Nor should his motivation be "**dishonest gain**."

No doubt, because of the deterioration in Ephesus, this would have been a necessary stipulation.

And, unfortunately, "**dishonest gain**" has not been an unknown problem in the history of Christendom.

And as we all know, it was the thin edge of the wedge in the downfall of Jesus' disciple Judas.

And certainly the Apostle Paul left no room for doubt when it came to money.

Remember the time when a large donation was being collected by the Gentile churches for the saints in Jerusalem?

Obviously, a considerable amount of money would have been involved.

Here's how Paul handled the situation.

I Corinthians 16:1-4 **"Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given orders to the churches of Galatia, so you must do also:**

2 On the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come. (And then notice how careful he was.)

3 And when I come, whomever you approve by your letters I will send to bear your gift to Jerusalem.

4 But if it is fitting that I go also, they will go with me."

No, not even the Apostle to the Gentiles would take any liberties when it came to money.

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So then, if money isn't a factor, then what should an elder's motivation be?

Well, when we finally get to I Timothy Chapter 3, we will discover that his motivation has been placed in his heart by the Lord.

And it's the only way he will be able to maintain the willing and eager attitude described in I Peter 5:2.

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Moving on to I Peter 5:3, we progress from an elder's motivation to his official position --- **"nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock."**

Certainly, as in any type of leadership, one of the first considerations should be authority.

Elders cannot do their job without the appropriate authority, but on the other hand, they shouldn't exhibit the attitude of lords over God's heritage.

It's a common tendency, and one the Lord Jesus had to deal with that night in the upper room.

Luke 22:25-26 **"And He said to them** (that is His disciples), **"The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those who exercise authority over them are called 'benefactors.'**

26 **"But not so *among* you; on the contrary, he who is greatest among you, let him be as the younger, and he who governs as he who serves."**

And it wasn't a case of, *Do as I say and not as I do.*

As He reminded them, **"---I am among you as the One who serves."**

So then, if the elders are not to be lords,
then what is their status?

Well, they're shepherds, aren't they?

Acts 20:28 says, you're to **"---take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood."**

Certainly a Shepherd must possess an appropriate amount of authority, but he is basically a leader.

That's why I Peter 5:3 points out that they should be **"examples to the flock."**

And when you think about it, a Shepherd is not a driver, as in the case of a cattle driver.

He's a leader.

He goes *before* the flock, and they follow him.

However, the elders must be equipped with something more than a godly example, important as that is.

There will be wandering sheep that will not follow their example.

There will be predators, both inside and outside the assembly, whom they must deal with.

As Paul put it in Acts 20:29, **"For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock."**

So then, what is the difference between a shepherd and a lord?

Well, a lord uses his authority to benefit himself at the expense of his people, while a shepherd uses his authority to protect the flock.

Certainly, his leadership abilities are important, but he must have the proper authority to do the job.

And that's why we have portions in God's Word such as Hebrews 13:17: **"Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you."**

Yes, the elders must exercise an appropriate amount of authority.

However, unlike some religious systems, where the word of man often supersedes the Word of God, this authority is not to be based on human wisdom or their own personal authority.

And in a real sense, an elder's authority is much like the authority vested in the husband of a Christian home.

In this case, his authority has not been given him to satisfy his male ego.

No, it's to enable him to guide and protect his family.

And that's the rationale behind the elders' authority.

And if you will allow me to skip ahead to I Timothy Chapter 3, we will see that rationale exhibited in one of the elders' requirements.

I Timothy 3:4-5 **"one who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence**

5 (for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?)"

And while I'm on the subject of authority, I should draw your attention to a word we came across in Acts 20:28: **"take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among**

which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers."

Obviously the word "**overseers**" is being used in reference to shepherding.

However, under certain circumstances, it can take on an entirely different meaning.

For instance, concerning the building of Solomon's Temple, II Chronicles 2:8 says Solomon used "**overseers to make the people work.**"

Obviously, these men were bosses, but that's not the case here.

No, Acts 20:28 is not talking about bosses making sure the employees do their work.

It's talking about shepherds looking after the flock's welfare.

Let me illustrate my point.

When a shepherd has guided his flock through the rough places and settled them in the green pasture, he has two options.

If he's a poor shepherd, he will settle down under the shade of a bush and go to sleep.

But if he's a conscientious shepherd, he will look for a little hillock or some other elevation where he can rest while overlooking his flock.

From that vantage point, he will be able to detect any predators creeping up on the flock, while at the same time, he will be able to spot any wayward members of the flock who might be tempted to wander off. So, in like manner, an elder is an overseer shepherding **"the church of God."**

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Well, I've taken a long path to get to I Timothy Chapter 3, but, finally, I think we're ready to consider the qualifications of elders.

I Timothy 3:1 **"This is a faithful saying: If a man desires the position of a bishop, he desires a good work."**

I'm sure some of us are having a bit of a problem with the word **"bishop."**

Because of long centuries of church tradition, the word *bishop* brings to mind a high-ranking official in ceremonial garments who is in charge of a diocese.

That concept comes from Rome, not the New Testament.

Actually, the word **"bishop"** means an overseer, and as such, describes the same shepherding activity that has been assigned to elders.

In other words, a bishop and an elder are the same thing.

However, because of any bias that might still remain, I will tend to use the term elder for the rest of this lesson.

So then, **"If a man desires the position of a bishop (or an elder), he desires a good work."**

And that's where it should begin.

Certainly, a brother might be approached by the church leadership concerning the possibility of becoming an elder.

But he should only accept such a responsibility if the Holy Spirit has placed a genuine desire in his heart to do so.

And not only that, but he must be wary, lest his motivation might be the result of some fleshly ambitions that might be resident in his heart.

But if his motivation is genuine, and **"---a man desires the position of a bishop, he desires a good work."**

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However, before he begins this **"good work,**
"he must meet certain qualifications.

The first one, which is found in I Timothy
3:2, says he **"must be blameless."**

Now, with the fallen nature we all possess,
you would think that would be the end of
the story right there.

And anyone who has ever held any position of
leadership will tell you that you can't
avoid being blamed for something.

After all, the only Perfect Man who ever
lived was blamed for all kinds of things.

So, obviously, what this requirement is
really saying is an elder's reputation
must be such that he cannot be justly
blamed.

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And then V 2 tells us an elder should be
"the husband of one wife."

At first glance, this requirement might seem simple enough, but, in practise, this hasn't always been the case.

Among the applicants, you can have singles, married, widowers, and the innocent party in a divorce.

And in checking with various commentators and individuals, I have discovered a wide range of interpretations, some very exclusive and some very inclusive.

All I can say is, we should be much in prayer for those who must seek the Lord's direction in real-life situations.

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As we continue with V 2, we will discover that an elder should be **"temperate, sober-minded, of good behavior, hospitable, able to teach."**

Let's look at these qualifications one at a time.

An elder should be "**temperate.**"

In other words, he should be someone who is not given to extremes.

He should be a person you can rely upon for sound judgment.

And then we are told an elder should be "**sober-minded.**"

I don't think this is referring to a man who is afraid to smile, but rather someone who is serious and clear minded in the way he conducts his affairs.

Next, an elder must be "**of good behavior.**"

He should be a man who is orderly in his conduct, and doesn't do questionable things.

And an elder should be "**hospitable.**"

That is, he should be willing to invite others into his home.

This would demonstrate a love for people and a willingness to make a genuine effort to show it.

And lastly, V 2 makes the stipulation that an elder should be **"able to teach."**

This, of course, would infer that he is a student of the Word, and able to communicate its truths either publicly, and, or, on a one-to-one basis.

Up until now, we have been looking at the positive qualifications for an elder, but there are other things that would disqualify him.

In V 3, we find that an elder must not be **"given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but gentle,** (there's a positive one) **not quarrelsome, not covetous."**

As I mentioned before, no doubt such prohibitions would have been appropriate in the backslidden assembly in Ephesus. But why would they be included in scripture? Shouldn't we expect all true believers to shun such things?

Well, yes, we should.

In fact, all of the qualifications mentioned above could be applied to all serious Christians.

However, the believers in Ephesus would not be the first or the last to succumb to worldly influences.

Nor would such qualifications be inappropriate throughout the often turbulent pages of church history.

V 6 stipulates that an elder should not be **"---a novice, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the *same* condemnation as the devil."**

This means an elder should not be young in the faith.

Until he has grown in the Word and his walk with the Lord, he is simply not prepared to lead the church.

V 7 **"Moreover he must have a good testimony among those who are outside, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil."**

There's nothing as harmful to the cause of Christ as a Christian who has a reputation in the neighbourhood for unethical business dealings or questionable conduct.

And it is even worse if that Christian is a church leader.

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And now we come to the qualifications for *deacons*.

I'm quite certain all churches and assemblies would have elders, but not all of them have deacons.

However, even though the term is not always used, the function always exists.

You see, the word *deacon*, as it is used in I Timothy 3:8, points to a servant who is engaged in his work.

He's not a servant of the elders, although he can be a great help to them.

No, he's a servant of Jesus Christ.

He's a believer who has been gifted and directed by his Lord to be involved in the many spiritual and temporal ministries that are so necessary in the work of the assembly.

Actually, the major difference I can see between elders and deacons is that the elders have been given the responsibility

of being shepherds of "**the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.**"

Nevertheless, regardless of the varied nature of the deacons' responsibilities, their essential ministry is a spiritual one, which is why their qualifications are spiritual.

In fact, some of their qualifications are the same as the elders'.

And for that reason, we will pass over these similar qualifications, and concentrate on the ones that are unique to deacons.

We will find these qualifications spelled out in I Timothy 3:8-13 ---"**Likewise deacons *must be reverent, not double-tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy for money,***

9 holding the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience.

10 But let these also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons, being *found* blameless.

11 Likewise *their* wives *must be* reverent, not slanderers, temperate, faithful in all things.

12 Let deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling *their* children and their own houses well.

13 For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a good standing and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus."

V 8 says a deacon "*must be reverent.*"

As I looked at various translations of this verse, I found the King James used the word "**grave,**" the NIV renders it "**worthy of respect,**" while the New American Standard uses the words "**men of dignity.**"

All of them, I believe, would refer to a man of genuine Christian character.

And a deacon is not to be **"double-tongued."**

Today we use the term, *Talking out of both sides of your mouth.*

He shouldn't say one thing to one person, and put a completely different slant on it when talking to someone else.

V 9 says he should hold **"the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience."**

In scripture, a mystery is something that has been previously hidden in the mind of God, but has now been revealed in scripture.

So I would think the qualification that is being described here is a sound working knowledge of the Word of God, and complete honesty in interpreting it.

Actually, V 10 describes a procedure rather than a qualification.

The applicants should "**first be tested; then let them serve as deacons, being found blameless.**"

In most cases, I think this would be an evaluation over time.

I say that because of the words "**being found blameless.**"

And a trial period, or what we might call an apprenticeship, is not unusual in God's program.

For instance, Moses spent 40 years in the wilderness as a shepherd before he was allowed to lead God's Chosen People.

And David spent his youth as a shepherd before he became the King of Israel.

And so, step by step, God prepares his people, and puts them into service.

And then V 11 says, "**Likewise their wives must be reverent, not slanderers** (there's

the negative one), **temperate, faithful in all things.**"

I'm sure you can all think of several ministries operating in your church or assembly that are the team effort of a husband and wife.

In this, as in so many ways, a Christian wife is a wonderful blessing.

Of course, slandering (which can often be hidden inside gossiping) is not one of these blessings.

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And then Paul concludes this section with some very encouraging words for these faithful servants.

V 13 **"For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a good standing and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus."**

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The chapter ends with one of the mysteries revealed in the New Testament.

V 16 **"And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh, Justified in the Spirit, Seen by angels, Preached among the Gentiles, Believed on in the world, Received up in glory."**

The **"mystery of godliness"** is all about Jesus Christ, and even a superficial consideration of its content could easily double the length of this lesson.

However, in bringing this lesson to a close, I will only make one small observation concerning that wonderful event when **"God was manifested in the flesh."**

When King Solomon dedicated the temple, he made this comment: **"But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain You.**

**How much less this temple which I have
built!"**

Yes, our God is so great that even the
"heaven of heavens" cannot contain Him.
And yet, because of that great mystery we
called the incarnation, what the **"heaven
of heavens"** could not contain, a little
manger could.